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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 0706
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 0066
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE 0264
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/FBI WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC IMMEDIATE

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SIPDIS

STATE PASS EUR/WE KATHERINE SHARP, S/CT AMBASSADOR
SCHLICHER AND KEREM BILGE, EUR/PGI LONNI REASOR, AND ANKARA
FOR CAROLYN DELANEY

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TAGS: [KTFN](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [BE](#)
SUBJECT: BELGIUM: PKK UPDATE

REF: 08 BRUSSELS 292

Classified By: Political Economic Counselor Richard Eason for reasons 1
.4 (B) and (D).

11. (S) Summary: Poloff and Polintern met with MFA
Counterterrorism Coordinator Thomas Baekelandt June 4 to
receive an update on the PKK (DHKP/C) in Belgium prior to
Deputy CT Coordinator Schlicher's scheduled trip to Brussels
June 9. Poloff and Legatt also met with Belgian Federal
Police Islam Expert Daniel Baucy May 19. Kurdish
representatives are active in Belgium and lobby both the
Belgian Parliament as well as the EU. The Belgian police and
intelligence agencies closely monitor the activities of
groups and individuals with suspected ties to the PKK. The
MFA believes the improved communication has shown the Turks
that Belgium is willing to take action against the PKK,
though the Turks remain insensitive to Belgium's explanations
on rule of law. The GOB is concerned with violence between
ethnic Turks and Kurds in Brussels that usually follows PKK
attacks or actions against the Turkish army in Turkey. End
Summary.

PKK Activities in Belgium

12. (S) According to our interlocutors, Kurdish leaders with
suspected links to the PKK are active in Belgium, and lobby
both the European and Belgian Parliaments. They may operate
legally as long as they do not break any laws, including
recruitment or incitement to violence, or have direct and
known links to the PKK. The National Congress of Kurdistan
(KNK) maintains a Brussels office. Baekelandt assured Poloff
that the GOB maintains a very close watch on these leaders
and their activities. None of these individuals have broken
laws that would lead to their arrest. Roj-TV, which has
production facilities near Denderleeuw, operated in Belgium
for several years; a February 2008 fine by tax authorities
led to a seizure of Roj-TV assets. Belgian authorities
believe the fine was heavy enough to prevent its operation
for some time. In a recent parliamentary query on whether
the tax investigation was an "Al Capone style" action to
close an otherwise legal station, Minister of Finance
Reynders replied that the investigation was ongoing and any
public disclosure was embargoed. Baucy said camps connected
to the PKK had operated in Belgium for youth, journalists,
and women. Authorities closed a youth camp in 2005, after

the landlord noticed his customers were not playing soccer at their "football camp." A women's camp was closed in summer 2008 in Gemmenich, Liege Province, near the German border. Belgian authorities believe the annual PKK Kampanya collects or extorts money from the Kurdish community in Belgium each year, in addition to efforts to collect monthly dues.

Turkish-Belgian Discussion on PKK

¶3. (S) Baekelandt and MFA colleagues are regularly visited by Turkish diplomats who deliver strong representations urging Belgium to arrest Kurdish leaders in Belgium. Baekelandt said he explains that Belgium's judiciary is independent and the need to make a legal case against individuals, a nuance he believes is sometimes lost on the Turks. He mentioned the ongoing Erdahl case, that began with an extradition request by the GOT. Though Ms. Erdahl has escaped, the case is being considered again after a third appeal, and the MFA predicts Ms. Erdahl and six of her associates will receive stiff sentences after summer recess. Baekelandt described a high-level visit from Ankara over a year ago as heavy-handed and added that it upset several members of the GOB and caused diplomatic tension between the two countries. In order to soothe the situation, the Belgian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Interior went to Ankara in October ¶2008. Belgium has also posted a magistrate and a police liaison officer in Ankara to improve information sharing. Baekelandt thinks the Turks now understand the GOB is making an effort to monitor the PKK and cooperate, but cautioned that the discussion of rule of law and freedom of movement

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are not often accepted by the Turks. He also admitted the GOB finds some Turkish intelligence suspect, especially lists of names provided by the GOT; the Belgian MFA believes some of these names might be anti-Turkish or Kurdish independence activists who have committed no crime and who may not in fact be tied to any listed terrorist organization.

Domestic Turkish-Kurdish Violence in Belgium

¶4. (S) Baekelandt mentioned a complicating factor in Belgian-Turkish discussions of the PKK: Turkish - Kurdish violence in Belgium. Second and third generation Belgians of Turkish origin (both ethnic Turks and Kurds) are the second largest Muslim minority community in Belgium. The two ethnic groups live adjacent to each other in the Brussels commune of St. Josse, a 10 minute walk north of the Embassy. Baekelandt said the GOB is alarmed by increasing violence committed by ethnic-Turkish gangs against ethnic Kurds minutes after PKK actions in Turkey, such as the kidnapping of Turkish commandos. The Kurdish community then reacts and commits violence against ethnic Turks. Baekelandt termed this Turkish-Kurdish gang violence a real-time security concern, and said Belgium would like more Turkish cooperation, so that the GOB might know when events in Turkey could spark a reaction in Belgium. Baekelandt also suggested the speed of reaction after events in Turkey might indicate the direct involvement by some part of the Turkish government or intelligence agency.

Comment

¶5. (S) The GOB is well aware of Turkish sensitivities regarding the PKK. Belgian police and security services do indeed monitor suspected PKK activities and keep Embassy contacts informed. The misunderstanding between Turkey and Belgium that sometimes occurs is one of cultural and political differences. From the Belgian point of view, the Turks want to stomp out Kurdish resistance and activism. For their part, the Belgians are willing to stop known terrorists and those who commit illegal acts in Belgium. The Turks meanwhile perceive Belgian lecturing on rule of law and

freedom as foot-dragging. This misunderstanding will take time to overcome.

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